



A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree in Management from the NOVA – School of Business and Economics.

An Analysis of Graduate Attitudes towards EY's Brand and their Competitors

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1. Brief context

1.1. Client

EY was founded in 1989 through a merger of the two service companies Ernst & Whinney and Arthur Young & Co and is headquartered in London, UK. EY is the third largest professional service provider worldwide after PwC and Deloitte. EY is managed in the most countries compared to its competitors and employs roughly 212,000 employees around the globe. In fact, EY is present with over 700 offices in around 150 countries, which gives EY the highest exposure to clients all over the world. EY has four main services lines: Assurance, Tax, consulting and Advisory, in which it holds exceptional expertise and enjoys high reputation among major clients.

In 2013, Ernst & Young decided to rebrand its company to EY, which should give the company a more modern face. The radical change to EY was closely connected to the realization of their vision 2020, in which EY wants to become the most competitive of the “Big Four” by hitting annual revenues of \$50 Billion and attracting the best talent to sustain this growth.

In 2015, EY had annual revenues of \$ 28.7 billion derived from the various service lines. The Assurance branch at EY accounts for approximately 41% of its annual revenues and hence most people are employed in there as well. According to the Universum Ranking, EY was ranked the third most attractive company to work for among students (Business Project presentation slides, 2016).

The CEMS Business Programme was exclusively related to the Irish market for EY. For Ireland, the reputation of EY as an employer however is not comparable to its worldwide standing. Here, EY only finds itself among the Top 20 most attractive companies to work for. Nevertheless, EY Ireland is following clear directions, which are formulated in the vision 2020. The main pillar is to increase global revenue to \$50 Billion in FY 2020, which can only be achieved through an intense hiring wave in the subsequent years. In fact, EY Ireland has not

only increased its headcount by 14.9% but also promoted 36% of its people. In FY 2016, EY forecasts to hire roughly 250 graduates, which resembles a 16% increase in incoming graduates compared to 2015 and 20% increase to 2014. Those figures narrow down to the fact that EY is among the largest recruiters in Ireland.

1.2. Market Overview

The natural competition of EY is the other audit firms of the “Big Four”: PwC, KPMG and Deloitte. The same holds true for Ireland, where EY faces an especially fierce pressure from its direct competitors, as it is perceived as the least attractive employer among the “Big Four”. The accumulated national Fee Income in 2015 of the “Big Four” in Ireland sums up to € 1 Billion. PwC, being the leading audit firm generates one third of this income. Just slightly behind PwC, the list is continued by KPMG, that generated roughly € 300 Million followed by Deloitte that managed to provide its services to clients worth roughly € 200 Million. The last position in the list is allocated to EY with a net worth of service fees in 2015 of € 166 Million. Worth to mention is that EY has been the fastest growing company among these four firms, with a fee increase of 17.7 % (Irish Times, Apr 20, 2015).

The Irish market has been going through radical changes in the past years. After the credit crunch and recession, the Irish government decided to attract investment through favorable tax regulations. The presence of an English speaking population has attracted a vast amount of Tech companies and Start-Ups that build their European Headquarters in Dublin and ever since attract a lot of talent. Traditional companies such as EY, face a high pressure of competition for graduates’ attraction. Many Irish students prefer Google, Facebook or Salesforce as a potential employer nowadays, that otherwise would have been interested in pursuing a graduate programme or regular entry position with EY.

In some competitor indexes also Accenture and Bank of Ireland are included in EY’s direct competitor analysis. As Accenture has broaden its portfolio of services from a IT-oriented base,

towards combining IT with Finance and Accounting it possesses expertise in Fintech, which is an appealing combination for students with an affinity for the service lines EY offers as well.

1.3. Current Client Situation

EY has high ambitions in terms of service revenue growth and hence has to ensure that each market grows accordingly. For Ireland, EY is performing the weakest compared to its peers in terms of service revenue. Moreover, EY finds itself among the least appealing companies to work for among its direct competitors, which harshly puts the targets at risk, as bright talent will be needed to sustain this growth.

In order to overcome this issue, EY Ireland hired Caroline McAniff as the new Head of Recruitment. Mrs. McAniff held the same title for many years at Bank of Ireland and only entered EY in late 2015. Her main responsibility is to attract enough talent that can ensure the growth strategy of EY.

1.4. Business Project Challenge

As Mrs. McAniff has only recently entered EY, it was essential for her to understand what the current situation at EY was. In fact, Mrs. McAniff asked specifically to find out about the current awareness and reputation of EY and its graduate programme.

EY understood that there is a strong need to actively engage with universities and comprehend what students are looking for upon graduating from university. Furthermore, it was crucial to comprehend, why EY is facing a low reputation among students and where this reputational issue derives from.

The main focus of the Business Project was lying in the Graduate Programme as an entry level as it is the most common programme to pursue a career with EY.

2. Reflection on the work done and individual contribution

2.1. Problem Definition

In order to assist the lack of understanding on how EY is currently doing in terms of reputation and attractiveness for graduate students, we closely worked throughout the project with Caroline McAniff. Based on our findings, she was determined to make any changes that would foster a stronger branding and awareness of EY as a potential employer among students.

The objective of the Business Project was fourfold:

First, a deeper analysis of the respective graduate programs among the “Big Four” had to be conducted. It is essential to point out whether EY’s competitors offer a superior package, which might explain the differences in reputation and attractiveness of students among the “Big Four”.

Second, the graduate recruitment market in Ireland was reviewed and analyzed by the team, with the objective to quantify the overall awareness and perception of EY and its respective graduate programme. In addition to that, an in depth research has to be conducted in order to get a clear understanding of graduates’ motivation to decide on joining a graduate programme in a particular company upon graduating.

Third, potential gaps between general desires of students in a graduate programme will be compared to the offer of EY, which will give a good understanding on why EY is facing insufficient applications of top talents.

Fourth, recommendations based on the main findings of this Business project will be developed that aim at improving the overall awareness and perception of EY Ireland’s brand and foster a strong competitiveness of EY among its peers.

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1 Hypothesis

Before starting with the actual research on possible answers to the objectives at stake, a reflection by the team has been done by brainstorming on pros and cons on applying to EY. By doing so, an actual idea of what might be effective reasons for a lack in awareness and reputation could arise. After having narrowed down the main reasons mentioned by the team on why not applying to EY and/or its graduate programme, a hypothesis that should guide through the entire process of information gathering and recommendation forming.

Summing up three main factors were identified as hypothetically being the most significant determinates of applying or not to EY: First, salary and possible bonuses have been mentioned, as a Master's or Bachelor's degree is usually a substantial investment in the future and hence salary and bonus should be sufficient to sustain a living and also pay off potential study loans. Second, work-life balance has been named and could certainly affect the choice of not applying to EY, as it is known for long working hours. Third, personal development was mentioned as the three year Graduate Programme includes becoming an accountant, with all relevant test and hence this variable is assumed to influence students' choice.

2.2.2 Data collection/ Methodology

In order to get a clear overview on the objectives of the Business Project, three complementary approaches to finding answers had to be done. First, secondary research has been conducted in order to get an in-depth overview of similarities and differences among the "Big Four" Graduate Programmes. This approach will give a good first indication on which areas EY is performing relatively well and in which aspects it still has to improve in order to enhance the overall perception of the company and its graduate programme. Second, an online questionnaire for Irish students from Top-Tier universities has been conducted in order to understand what exactly those students are looking for and if there are any clear trends visible with regard to EY's perception among students. Third, in-depth interviews with current

graduates at EY and its peers have been conducted in order to better understand the reasoning for entering the respective Graduate Programme.

2.2.3 Secondary Research

First, secondary research has been conducted in order to benchmark EY with its direct competitor's graduate programs. This research has been conducted through a variety of channels that companies use in order to communicate the opportunity of a graduate programme with target students. For a start, the respective career platforms and online brochures for the graduate programmes have been used to get a clear possibility of comparison among the "Big Four".

For the graduate programme, aspects such as number of open vacancies, application deadline and minimum academic requirements have been researched and compared. Further, the application processes have been compared in addition to social events that were published and all benefits that were publically available.

In order to get a clear understanding on where differences among the "Big Four" might occur, all relevant information about each respective graduate program has been gathered (please refer to Appendix 8 for the detailed comparison of Graduate Programmes).

2.2.3 Online Questionnaire

Second, primary research for data collection has been conducted through a structured online questionnaire. The aim of this questionnaire is three-fold:

First, to investigate what last- and penultimate year Bachelor's and Master's students at Irish universities are looking for in a Graduate Programme they are considering to applying to. A list of potential factors was created that participants could choose up to five different factors that they perceive the most relevant one's. If a participant had the feeling that an important aspect has not been part of the list, it has also been possible to fill in an open answer field.

Second, to assess the level of awareness of EY's brand and its graduate programme in Ireland in direct comparison with its competitors. For all companies the same scales and tables have

been used which enabled a clear and direct relative comparison of the overall awareness of EY and its graduate programme to its competition. Here, a top of mind question has been used to identify the most frequent “Big Four” participants mentioned. The result here was integrated with a polar question asking the sample about its awareness of EY and its competitors.

Third, similar to the analysis of the awareness, EY’s perception relative to its competition has also been analyzed as part of the online questionnaire. In order to get an understanding of the perception differences of “Big Four” among students, two Likert-scale questions were integrated to investigate the impression of EY and competitors as potential employers and the likelihood of students to apply to the respective graduate programmes. Depending on the response from the latter question, an open question on the motivation to apply or not for the EY graduate programme has been installed.

2.2.4. In-depth Interviews

The interviews have been conducted as a complementary to the online survey findings, as the personal answers give the opportunity to investigate the causes and patterns derived from the general online survey. Participants from EY and its competitors that currently follow the graduate programme have been contacted for a 20-30 minutes interview. Some of the participants could not have been contacted via phone but agreed to answer the questions via mail.

The main objective was to understand how they created awareness for the respective company and its graduate Programme and whether those answers were in accordance with the findings from the online survey. Moreover, it was investigated whether they have applied to other companies and what specific reasons have been to start with one of the “Big Four”. Additionally, participants were asked about pros and cons of the specific graduate programme followed and whether they would recommend the programme to their friends.

2.3. Results/ Analysis

This chapter will outline the main findings from the secondary research, the online questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. The aggregate trends and findings will build the basis for the recommendations.

2.3.1. Secondary research

To begin with, it is of importance to mention that EY was the online company among the “Big Four”, that has no brochure for the graduate programme online available. For comparison we kindly asked Mrs. McAniff to provide us with a sample.

Generally, the graduate programmes do not differ much content wise from each other. As all companies do not significantly offer a superior package and all companies are competing for similar profiles in talents, differentiation is key to be at least perceived to be superior to your competitor. However, there were some factors that have been better communicated by the competitors than by EY. Those factors have a tremendous effect on the perceived differentiation among the companies' graduate programmes. Besides EY, all companies put high emphasize on work-life balance and corporate culture through sports and leisure events. Further, KPMG and Deloitte stress out the opportunities of personal development and learning abilities by advertising their internal academies and training centers that aim to help with the accountant exams (Deloitte Learning Academy and KPMG Business School). This aspect is further supported by the fact that those two companies also advertise the exam success rates in their brochures and exam placements where they find themselves as the best ranked in the country.

2.3.2. Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire has been answered by 228 participants and can hence be considered as representative for conclusions to be drawn from the results. From all responses received, 51% of the students are interested in a graduate programme upon leaving university (Appendix 1).

Further, there among the respondents there are four main motivational drivers for the willingness to apply to a certain graduate programme. From the table below (Figure 1), it can be seen that 74% of all respondents interested in a graduate programme are looking for a decent

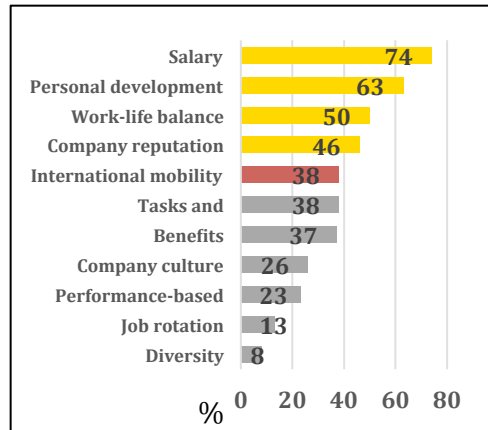


Figure 1- Students Preferences

salary. This is followed by personal development (63%), work-life balance (50%) and company reputation (46%).

The following part identifies which factors contribute to the creation of awareness of companies among students. It can be seen that there is only one factor that effectively shape awareness for a company among students, which is word of mouth (Appendix 2). 42.5%

of respondents have named word of mouth as the main creator of awareness of a company's existence, followed by career fairs (13.5%).

When analyzing the relative awareness of students' awareness of the "Big Four" through a top

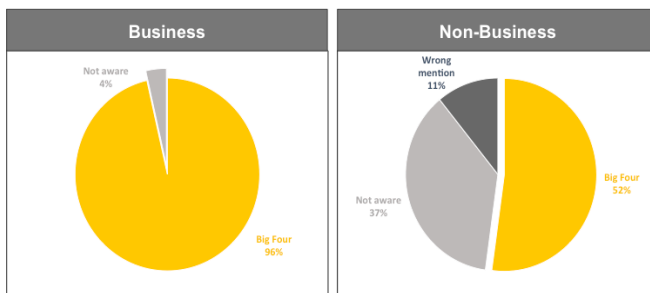


Figure 2- Awareness of students

of mind question, a clear trend can be identified as displayed below: The "Big Four" are facing awareness problems solely with Non-Business students.

In fact, 37% of Non-Business students are not aware of what the "Big Four" companies are and 11% of Non-Business students even mentioned a wrong company.

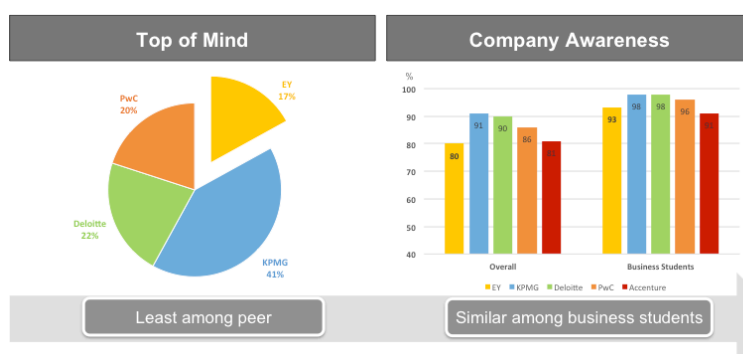


Figure 3-Relative Awareness of EY

Figure three shows the relative awareness of EY compared to its peers. It can be seen that only 17% of all respondents of the

Top of mind question mentioned EY- the least frequent among its peers. From the bar chart it can also be determined that only 80% have said to know EY in a separate awareness question, again being the least frequently mentioned. In order to prove the awareness issue for Non-Business students, the percentages for awareness among Business students have been displayed. It can be seen that 93% of Business students from the sample are aware of EY and hence the negative trend of overall awareness must be coming from Non-Business students. Hence, EY faces an issue of awareness among Non-Business students. Worth to mention is that among those students being aware of a certain company and then being asked whether they are also aware of the Graduate programme, EY is the leading company with 73% of all students being aware of EY also being aware of the Graduate Programme at EY. The main driver for that awareness is again given by word of mouth (Appendix 3).

The third part of the survey aimed at finding out the general reputation of the “Big Four” audit firms. The likert scale below measures on a scale from 1-5 (here only the area 2-5 is displayed to make the differences more visible) the reputation of each company included in the survey. It can be seen that EY faces the lowest reputation among its peers and the gap between EY and its competitors as the analysis filters for Business students. The gap is becoming even worse when considering the subsample of Bachelor’s Business students.

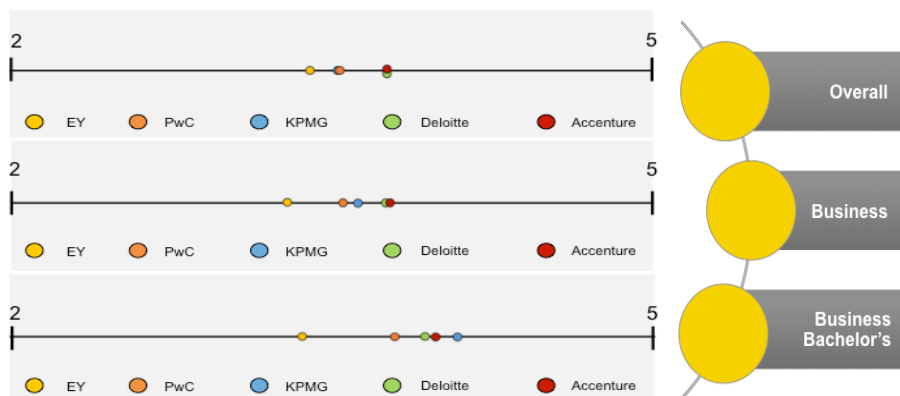


Figure 4-Reputation EY

among Business students and especially Bachelor’s students that follow a Business related studies.

Hence, it can be said that EY faces a problem when it comes to reputation of the company

The same analysis has been conducted with regard to the likelihood of applying to the graduate programmes of the “Big Four”. Again the trend is that Bachelor’s Business students are the least likely one’s to apply. This strengthens the fact that EY faces a strong reputational issue for Bachelor’s Business students (Appendix 4). Factors mentioned in an open question in favor of applying are a good summer internship experience and potential growth opportunities. EY being perceived as only a tax and accounting firm and a general bad reputation as employer were the most frequent answers against EY’s graduate programme.

To sum up the findings of the three objectives, for student preferences it was shown that 51% of respondents are interested in a Graduate Programme and highly value four aspects: Salary, personal development, work-life balance and company reputation. Further, EY only faces an awareness problem among Non-Business students and among all those students that are aware of EY every third out of 4 students is also aware of EY’s graduate programme. Among Business students EY is facing the worst reputation, which is also true for its Graduate Programme. Especially Bachelor’s Business students do not consider EY as an attractive employer.

2.3.3. In-Depth Interviews

The In-Depth Interviews were conducted to double-proof the findings from the online questionnaire. In total, ten interviews with EY graduates, two with KPMG and one interview with a PwC graduate has been conducted. The overall findings for the awareness of the company and its graduate programme has been aligned with the findings of the questionnaire, namely that the word of mouth as a tool for awareness outperforms any other factor. This holds true for all interviewees from each company. The dominant reasons for applying to a certain graduate programme have been an excellent summer internship experience for the EY and PwC respondents and the KPMG graduate answered that the on campus presentation made him apply to the programme. Hence, also this aspect is in line with the findings of the graduate programme. Perceived differences among the graduate programmes do literally not exist for all

of the respondents and only corporate culture differentiates the companies. When asked for positive aspects in the current graduate programme, most responses have been about the good corporate culture, a well functioning training and development policy internally and the exposure to different industries. On the downside “Big Four” graduates have mentioned the lack of a work-life balance, low salary and lack of international exposure.

2.3.4. Conclusion of methodology and proof of hypothesis

As we had assumed, salary, work-life balance and personal development have a huge impact on the willingness to enter a graduate programme. The findings from the survey clearly support the hypothesis, which can hence be accepted. The findings showed above are the base for the recommendations developed for EY to foster a better reputation and awareness among students. As pointed out, there is a difference among how to attract Business students and Non-Business students, which will also be handled separately in the following part of recommendations.

2.4. Recommendations to EY

2.4.1. Recommendations for Business students

For Business students it is key to influence the perception of EY’s brand and engage with those students early, as we have seen that the negative reputation is the least favorable among Bachelor’s students.

2.4.1.1. Improve Summer Internship Experience

As the main factor for students to answer a high likelihood of applying to the graduate programme at EY, it would be of EY’s best interest to invest heavily in that experience for students. Summer interns then can be one of the biggest drivers of EY’s brand communication strategy on Bachelor’s level. Through sharing a great summer internship experience at EY an improvement of the overall reputation can be achieved as the latter is mainly driven by word of mouth. Further, as interns are the most likely promoters of the Graduate Programme, it is important to provide them with a memorable experience. As research has found that the most

important factors for Business students besides salary, being personal development and international opportunities, EY should aim at providing unforgettable memories for its students. An example herefore would be to make use of a best practice used by Accenture, which sends its Analysts to Chicago as part of their training. On a smaller scale this would improve the overall experience and certainly have a positive impact on the word of mouth.

2.4.1. 2. Exclusive recruitment Events/Skills seminars/Workshops

The second most impactful tool to create a good reputation is to offer more exclusive recruitment events. As the awareness among business students is already there, EY has to create a long-lasting impression when presenting themselves in front of Business students in order to attract new talent. PwC, for instance, offers “The Big Sail Adventure” in Germany, where students go on a three-day sailing trip in the Atlantic Ocean. During this trip, students have the chance to dive into the global operations and projects of the company. Events like this can create a long-lasting relationship with young talent that certainly will increase the likelihood to apply for EY’s graduate programme.

2.4.1.3 Improve Brand Ambassadors & Representatives on Campus Events

EY makes use of former summer interns as brand ambassadors at their home university. Their job is to represent EY on campus and host events that are conducted in the particular school. One of the channels for distributing the questionnaire has been through the brand ambassadors, however the response from that channel has been relatively small. Hence, the recommendation is to provide ambassadors with adequate training, where they can learn how to communicate and engage proactively with prospective candidates. Since the ambassadors are the ears and eyes of EY on campus, they can assist in a more effective brand communication once trained accordingly.

2.4.2. Recommendations for Non-Business Students

The market for Non-Business students can be considered as a still untapped market as the awareness among those students for EY is relatively low. Hence, it is key to increase awareness and visibility among those students in order to ensure their application. This stands in accordance with an effective communication of a positioning that EY is more than an accounting firm and provides unique entry opportunities. As there is a general lack of awareness of the “Big Four”, EY could be able to attract the top talent in this market by having the first mover advantage. If EY manages to successfully establish an awareness and good reputation, they will have a competitive advantage in recruiting those talents.

2.4.2.1. Increase visibility of EY on Campus at Non-Business faculties

The first obvious recommendation to increase awareness is the expansion of on campus events and marketing activities for Non-Business faculties. This can be achieved by small activities on a regular basis. J.P. Morgan for instance, offers free smoothies every week at LSE, which creates a hype around the campus and EY will quickly be a big topic among students. Further, events with EY graduates that come from a similar background should be organized as those students can provide information on how they got to EY and about the graduate programme. KPMG in Germany gives a good best practice: They invited computer science related students to recruitment events such as “Chances@KMPG”, where an informal networking event in a video games museum was taking place.

2.4.2.2. Increase online presence

Only 1% of all participants have answered that awareness of EY has been gained through social media. This implies that EY’s digital presence is not sufficient enough for creating additional awareness. As our generation spends on average 25-30 hours per week online, EY can certainly leverage on this and create awareness among Non-Business students through powerful tools such as Facebook’s “Brand Awareness Campaign” or Google’s “Adwords Campaign”. These

tools enable EY to perfectly target Non-Business related students from certain target universities and will have a major impact on its overall awareness.

2.4.2.3. Offer Webinars for Non-Business Background

Another way to create awareness among Non-Business related students is to offer online webinars about subject specific topics. This could be on cyber hacking for IT-students or legal implication in M&A for law students. Giving those students the opportunity to discover how their background relates to EY online from home, can create a good awareness among those students and leave behind the perception of EY online being an accounting firm. Those events can conclude with short Q&A sessions, which would make them more interactive and engaging.

2.5. Limitations/Concerns

The nature and scope of the research conducted for the Business project exposed the team to some limitations. For the overall project, time has been a major limitation as only three months, which limited for instance the availability of graduates for in-depth interview. Also, in order to make it a coherent impression of the graduates towards their position, the same interview should have been conducted again after some time. Attitudes on the work place can vary immensely, which implies that we were only able to grasp a snapshot of the moment. Moreover, some interviews could only be filled out online, which prevented a more interactive conversation that would have fostered a better understanding of the motivation behind their answers. Graduates at Deloitte refused to take place in the interview sessions. Hence, we were forced to leave out the impressions from one of the “Big Four”. The regulations for confidentiality also prevented us from talking to graduates that refused the offer from EY. This would have given a more cohesive picture on motivations on whether to start or not at EY. As none of the team members were of Irish heritage, it was difficult for us to send out the online questionnaire. Having targeted only Irish students put a limitation on the distribution ability of

the team for the online questionnaire. Further, only one PhD student answered the survey, which is why this group was left out of the analysis and as mentioned not all of the Brand Ambassadors did an equally good job. Hence, the majority of answers came from four top tier universities.

2.6. Individual Contribution

I have been actively engaged in every part of the planning and execution stage along the Business project but individually focused after some time on some specific aspects that had to be done in order to achieve the desired results. When the stage of conducting research was achieved, I personally volunteered to develop the online questionnaire with Qualtrics, which had to be communicated and approved by Mrs. McAnnif. Hence, I was also entirely responsible for updating the current status and presenting the form of the online questionnaire with her. Further, it was my responsibility to make sure to hit a minimum target of 100 responses in the questionnaire, which was more than doubled as we ended up with a total response base of 228 students. As I was fully involved in the development of the survey, I also took over the analysis part for the questionnaire. This included finding correlations and creating subsamples with significant similarities. The online questionnaire was the main pillar for our overall findings and gave base for the recommendations presented above.

3. Academic Discussion

3.1. Links to MSc in Management

As the scope of the Business Project is entirely designed as a recruitment consulting report, parallels to the course of Human Resource Management, taught by Mrs. Campos e Cunha.

In fact, during class the topic on how to attract talent has been discussed. The theory perfectly fits to the scope of our Business project and can be closely related to our findings and recommendations.

According to the lecturer, in order to attract very good talent, you have to match the value proposition of potential employees that consists of three main pillars: company reputation, job offered and price. Company reputation is based on its branding derived from corporate culture and values, which must be appealing to the target segment. Job offered is related to the personal development abilities, whether the colleagues are nice and the job overall is enjoyable. The price obviously is related to a competitive pay and side benefits. Those three aspects have been mentioned in the online questionnaire among the most important aspects students look for in a graduate programme.

The process of attracting talent is a threefold: First, HR planning has to take place, in which supply and demand for talent is evaluated in order to assess deficits or excess of HR. Second, a clear job analysis has to be developed, which makes sure that not only the job is suitably communicated with potential employees and requirements for the job are clarified. The last step is the actual recruitment of talents, with the objective to minimize cost, while increasing the pool of talents and reducing the turnover of employees. For the recruitment process, a pool of external and internal talent can be gathered. Internally, companies can post jobs in the intranet, which leads to promotion or changes in job that might suit talents inside a corporation. Externally, companies should take part in career fairs, on- and offline advertisement and social events, among others. These aspects also perfectly suit to our findings and recommendations of the Business Project.

Overall, it can be seen that if companies clearly understand what the target segment is looking for and makes use of clear communication for exactly those aspects, the recruitment process will be able to draw from a much wider pool of talents. The theory discussed in class perfectly resembles our approach to finding solutions for EY to attract more talent.

3.2. Relevant Theories and Empirical Studies

One of the findings for perceived good reputation is to clearly differentiate through a well-communicated corporate culture. Leslie de Chernatony and Susan Cottam give 5 main aspects

in corporate culture that should be avoided in order to sustain a company's success. First, a general inconsistency between corporate culture and brand values should be avoided. When corporate internal values immensely differ from how the brand is communicated with its clients, the sustainable success of that particular company is at risk, according to the authors. Second, companies should avoid the evolvement of different values within corporate subcultures. For EY that would imply, that the values among the different services lines should be aligned for the overall corporate success. Third, a "tough culture" should be avoided, as it is associated with fear and a work place, where risk and new initiatives are discouraged and punished does not lead to a strong brand representation of employees which leads to a bad reputation and a lower success rate in the long run. Fourth, focusing on financial targets, as EY is doing for the vision 2020, can be harmful for the brand image. Managers are advised to incorporate further internal goals that are related also to soft- and hard skills that have a short and long run vision. Fifth and last, unsuccessful and poorly thought out cultural change initiatives can be harming the culture. As a company decides to change culture it has to be well thought through, as changing a company culture can lead to huge resistance within the work force and hence can take a lot of time, money and effort to push it through (Leslie de Chernatony, Susan Cottam, 2008).

Overall, it can be seen that some of the points to be avoided for a company that wants to make its corporate culture the main differentiator have actually been done by EY. The five aspects to be avoided should be considered by any company in order to attract talent and retain good employees.

3.3. Implications for Theory and future Research

An important implication for EY is to understand that there are a lot of opportunities for improvement of the overall corporate culture and especially how this culture is communicated. In the recommendations, it could already be found that EY should strongly communicate the

aspects that graduates are looking for and make those students conducting an internship, enjoying the corporate culture and work environment. Further, even though being a financial service provider, targets should not solely be based on financial facts.

Once the recommendations have been implemented and new interns and graduates have gone through the experience, it has to be research again, how the perception and awareness among students has evolved for EY. In my perspective, this could be an excellent research task for a Business Project in the upcoming year.

4. Personal Reflection

4.1. Personal experience

4.1.1. Key strengths and weaknesses observable during the project

Throughout the Business Project, it has been my big strength to think analytically and bring group discussions back to relevant topics, which made our meetings highly efficient. As mentioned, I have been personally responsible for the development of the online questionnaire and the subsequent analysis of the answers that were the main base for our recommendations. Moreover, I have been an effective communication address for EY, the academic supervisor and our team. As I have guided through most of the meetings, both EY and Mrs. Guthrie usually were in contact with me for any queries.

However, despite having been a good team player throughout the Business project, I realized that I could get very impatient under pressure, which was revealed especially during the last week before finalizing the Business project. First, I realized that under pressure I have issues with handling critique from my teammates. Second, I have reflected on how I give feedback under pressure to my colleagues, which can be somewhat too straightforward for some people from certain cultural backgrounds.

4.1.2. Plan to develop of your areas of improvement

Already during the course of the last week, I have understood that for any of my responsibilities to be handed in, I have to expect critique in the sense of I have to prepare myself that what I am handing in will most likely not be the perfect solution. Instead I tried and will try in the future to anticipate the feedback and take it as a good way of improving my skills on academic writing, PowerPoint or excel. Feedback should be taken as a way of improvement, which can only make me a brighter individual. In addition to that, I am trying to get less stressed as time is getting shorter, as this pressure only harms efficiency and makes me lose the eye for details and high analytical skills that usually are my main strengths.

4.2. What added most value? What should have been done differently?

I have wisely chosen to conduct the Business Project with EY, as I am planning to continue my career in the field of consulting. For me, the most value added was to understand the internal recruitment process and what most of the consulting and auditing firms are looking for in a potential candidate. Additionally, I reflected on the fact that even though most consulting firms seem to be very similar on paper, I should conduct in-depth research on the corporate culture and read about experiences of former employees and then reflect on whether my personality would be a good fit for the position and respective company.

Overall, I have to say that the team composition was excellent and the team spirit has always been outstanding. One thing that could have done better would be related to time management. We defined a clear schedule in one of the first meetings, but were never able to really stay within the deadlines. Hence, I would say that time management within the group could have been improved and would have saved a lot of stress for the last days upon handing in.

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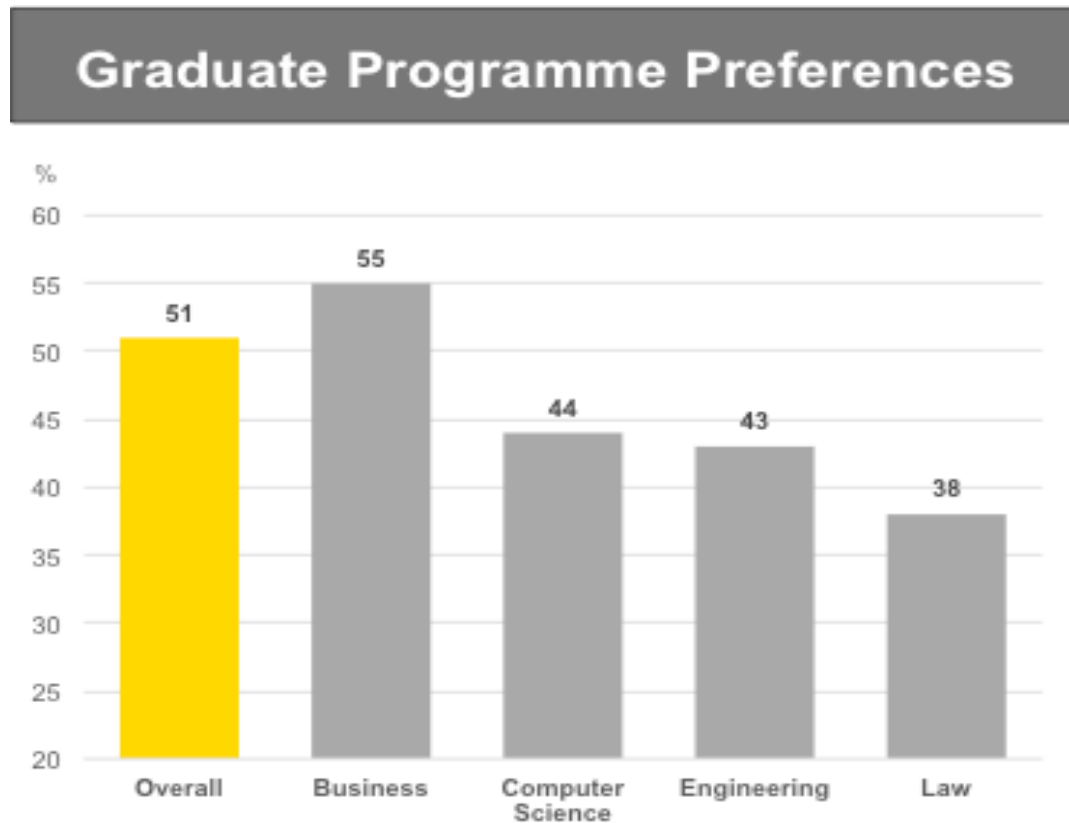
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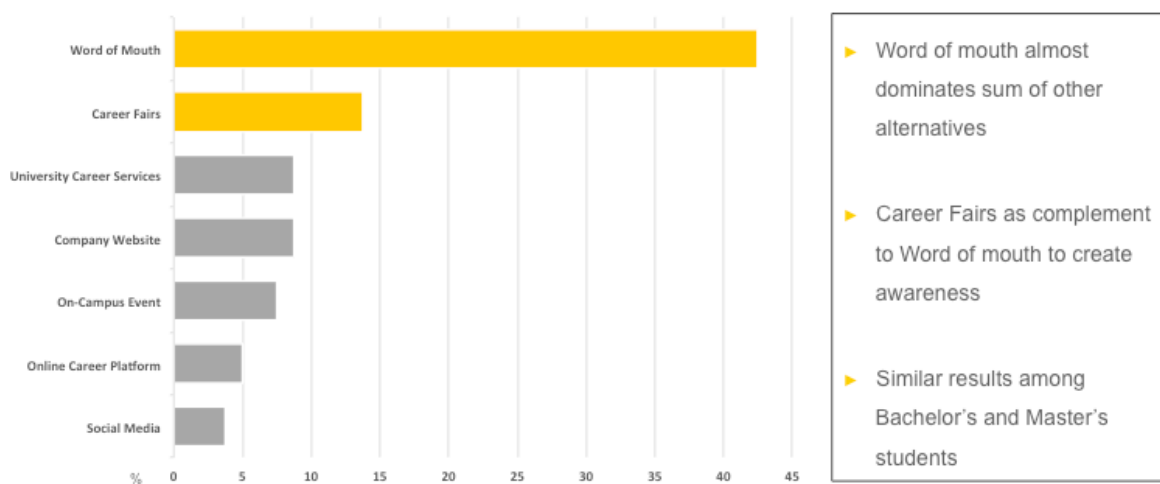
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Appendix

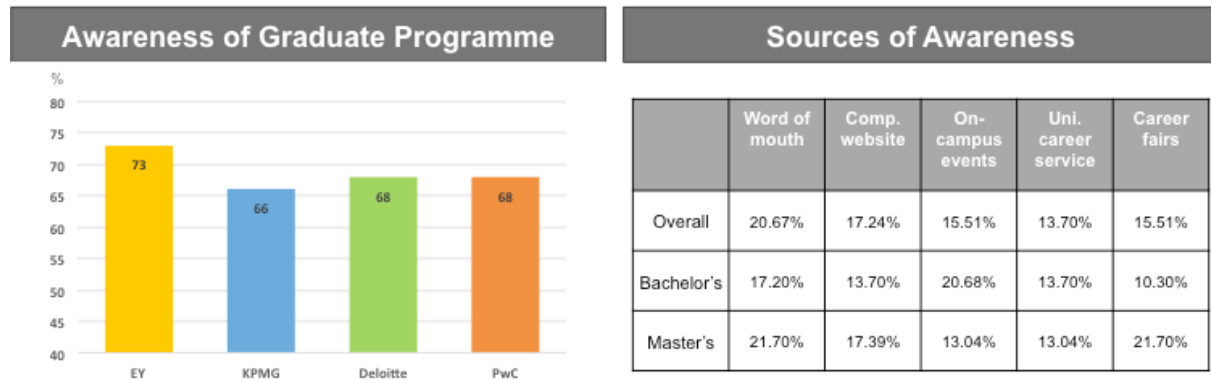
Appendix 1-Percentage of participants interested in Graduate Programme



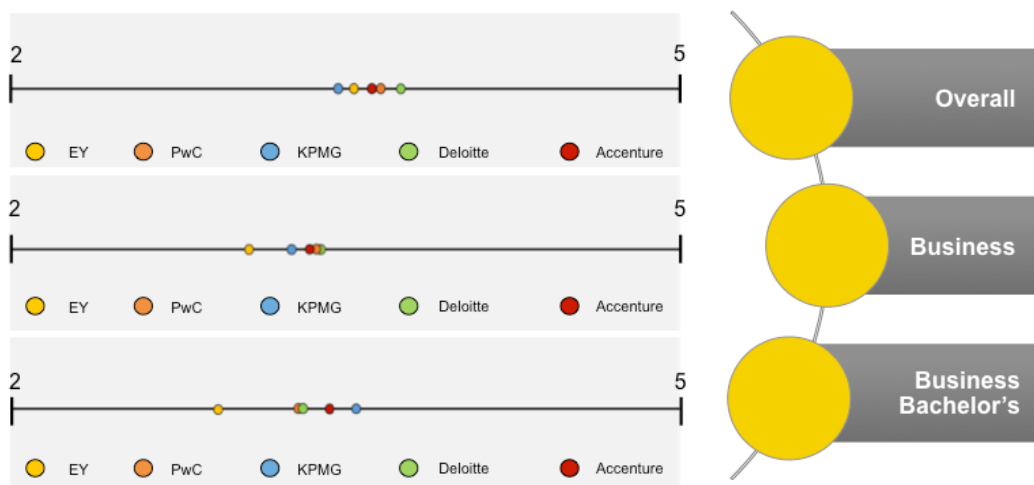
Appendix 2- Factors contributing to creating Awareness of Companies among Students



Appendix 3 – Awareness of Graduate Programme given aware of company and source



Appendix 4-Relative Reputation of Graduate Programmes



Appendix 5-Online Questionnaire

Q34

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey (approx. 3 minutes)

The survey is being conducted as part of our thesis at UCD. The objective is aimed at understanding the perception of different Graduate Programmes in Ireland.

Every participant has the chance to win:

1st prize €100 One4All voucher
2nd prize €50 One4All voucher
3rd/4th prize €25 One4All voucher

Thanks a million,

Trang, Robin, Marco and Michael

Page Break

Q6

Which of the following entry levels are you considering after graduating? (Multiple answers possible)

☐ Internship

☐ Graduate Programme

☐ Full-time position

☐ Part-time position

☐ Further education (Master, PhD, MBA)

If Graduate Programme Is Not Selected, Then Skip To How likely are you to look at the com...

Skip Logic

Page Break

Q8

What factors are of importance when applying to a graduate programme? (Maximum of 5)

☐ Salary

☐ Performance based bonus

☐ Benefits (health benefits, gym, meals etc.)

☐ Tasks & responsibilities

☐ Work-life balance

☐ Job rotation (between departments)

☐ International mobility

☐ Personal development (training, mentoring) & growth opportunities

☐ Company reputation

☐ Company culture

☐ Diversity (gender, race, LGBT)

☐ Other

Page Break

Q10

What is the first company that comes to your mind when thinking of the "Big Four"?

☐ Please name

☐ I do not know the "Big Four"

If Please name Is Selected, Then Skip To Which of the following companies are ...

Skip Logic

Q23

The Big Four are the four largest international professional services networks, offering audit, assurance, tax, consulting, advisory, actuarial, corporate finance, and legal services.

Q11

Which of the following companies are you aware of?

☐ PwC
☐ EY
☐ KPMG
☐ Deloitte
☐ Accenture
☒ None of the above

If None of the above is Selected, Then Skip To How likely are you to look at the com...

Skip Logic

Page Break

Q12

How have you heard about each of the following companies?

	Word of mouth	Company website	Social media	Online career platforms	University career service	On-campus events	Career fairs	Other
» PwC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» EY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» KPMG	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Deloitte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Accenture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» None of the above	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Which of the following companies are you aware of?"

Edit

Q13

What is your impression of the following companies as a potential employer?

	Very negative	Somewhat negative	Indifferent	Somewhat positive	Very positive
» PwC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» EY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» KPMG	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Deloitte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Accenture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» None of the above	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Carry Forward Selected Statements from "How have you heard about each of the following ..."

Edit

Page Break

Q14

Are you aware of the graduate programme of the following companies?

☒ I do not know any of those graduate programmes
☐ » PwC
☐ » EY
☐ » KPMG
☐ » Deloitte
☐ » Accenture
☐ » None of the above

Carry Forward Selected Statements from "What is your impression of the following compan..."

Edit

If I do not know any of those ... Is Selected, Then Skip To How likely are you to look at the com...

Skip Logic

Page Break

Q16 □

How have you heard about the respective graduate programmes?

	Word of mouth	Company website	Social media	Online career platform	University career service	On-campus events	Career fairs	Other
» I do not know any of those graduate programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» PwC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» EY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» KPMG	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Deloitte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Accenture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» None of the above	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Carry Forward Selected Choices from "Are you aware of the graduate programme of the ..." Edit

Page Break

Q17 □

How likely are you to apply to the respective graduate programme?

	Highly unlikely	Somewhat unlikely	Indifferent	Somewhat likely	Very likely
» I do not know any of those graduate programmes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» PwC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» EY	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» KPMG	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Deloitte	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» Accenture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
» None of the above	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Carry Forward Selected Statements from "How have you heard about the respective graduat..." Edit

Page Break

Q26 □

Display This Question:
 If How likely are you to apply to the respective graduate programme? EY - Somewhat likely Is Selected
 Edit
 Or How likely are you to apply to the respective graduate programme? EY - Very likely Is Selected Edit

Why are you considering applying to the EY Graduate Programme?

Page Break

Q24 □

Display This Question:
 If How likely are you to apply to the respective graduate programme? EY - Highly unlikely Is Selected
 Edit
 Or How likely are you to apply to the respective graduate programme? EY - Somewhat unlikely Is Selected Edit

Why are you not considering applying to the EY Graduate Programme?

Page Break

Q30 □

How likely are you to look at the company's website to help your decision in researching a graduate programme?

Not at all likely 0 1 2 3 4 Indifferent 5 6 7 8 9 Highly likely 10

Page Break

Q31

How influential is the content of a company's website on your decision of which graduate programme to choose?

Not at all

0

1

2

3

4

Indifferent

5

6

7

8

9

Very much

10

Page Break

Q32

How influential are testimonials from people currently completing a graduate programme in helping you make a decision on which graduate programme to choose?

Not at all

0

1

2

3

4

Indifferent

5

6

7

8

9

Very much

10

Page Break

Q25

Lastly, a few questions about yourself.

Page Break

Q4

Which university are you graduating from?

☐ UCD

☐ Trinity College

☐ DCU

☐ UCC

☐ NUI Galway

☐ NUI M

☐ NC Ireland

☐ DIT

☐ AIT

☐ CIT

☐ DKIT

☐ AIDT

☐ GMIT

☐ ITB

☐ IT Carlow

☐ IT Sligo

☐ IT Tallaght

☐ IT Tralee

☐ LYIT

☐ LIT

☐ WIT

☐ UL

☐ Other

Q5

When is your graduation date?

☐ 2016

☐ 2017

Q1

I am between:

☐ 18-21 years

☐ 22-25 years

☐ 26 and above

Q2

What is your gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Prefer not to say

Q3

What is your field of studies?

☐ Business, Economics, Management

☐ Law

☐ Engineering

☐ Computer Science

☐ Others

Q5 ☐
 When is your graduation date?
☐ 2016
☒ 2017

Q27 ☐
 What is your Graduation degree?
☐ Bachelor
☒ Master
☐ PhD

Q33 ☐
 Thank you for participating. Please provide us with your email address if you want to participate in the draw of 1x100 Euro, 1x50 Euro and 2x25 Euro All for One vouchers.

Appendix 6-Interview Question Catalogue

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?
2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?
3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?
4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?
5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?
6. Why did you take the offer of EY?
7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?
8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?
9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?
10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?
11. If yes, why?
12. If no, why?
13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

Appendix 7- Interview Summary

Interview with EY graduate trainee A (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

A: I heard about EY and its program from a friend who was applying for a position here

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

A: Yes.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

A: Yes.

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

A: I applied for the graduate programme because EY seemed like an interesting company and I liked the international connections it advertised.

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

A: Apart from my internship at a Roadside signage manufacturing company I have had no other offers.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

A: I took the offer from EY because it gave me a chance to improve on the financial aspect of my business knowledge, which due to my qualifications I did not have a lot of exposure to.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

A: I am unsure as to the differences between the graduate programs. From speaking with other people in both the EY graduate program and the other big four programs the differences seem to concern the level of study leave the other big four companies get, the people they interact with, the work culture and their work life balance (which according to various sources can be worse or better than EY's). Other than these differences I am of the opinion that the graduate programs tend to be similar in its packaging

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

A: I like the fact that because most of the personnel in EY have gone through the program, they understand the difficulties I face and are very helpful in helping me overcome them.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

A: The lack of clarity concerning our study leave. For example not explaining the impact block release classes would have on our study leave at the end of the year and not providing us with the option to choose in what way we wanted to attend class in order to minimize that effect. Apart from this the negative aspects are factors you would expect to happen when you are trying to study and hold a full time job like the lack of personal time.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

A: For the moment yes.

11. If yes, why?

A: Because it gives me the opportunity to move and work abroad after my program concludes. Also apart from the stress of trying to study and work at the same time and the lack of time for myself, the work itself is not bad. Once my program is finished I would assume that I would have more free time to improve my work life balance. If I can achieve that balance then I wouldn't mind continuing to work at EY.

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

A: Yes I would. Because at the minimum it provides you with a varied amount of experience in a very short time span and improves your network. Plus I like the ambience of the company in general.

Interview with EY graduate trainee B (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

B: About EY's summer internship programme, mother works there and career fair in college, got into internship programme. During internship became aware of the graduate programme.

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

B: No.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

B: Yes, accounting based, Glandia, Kerry Group and smaller firms (BDO)

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

B: Bond with company because of internship, good impression of company and people, study leave and exam support

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

B: Yes, at every company where I applied.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

B: Because of the reasons mentioned before and because I wanted to work in Dublin.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

B: There is a big people focus at EY, a lot of social events, networking, counselor is very valuable. Not as actively in other companies from what I have heard from friends working there. Buddy on your peer level is also valuable and important to integrate quickly.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

B: In transaction advisory you get the opportunity of job rotation every 6 months, in Dublin in the specific department (transaction advisory), probably that is different in audit.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

B: You feel like you are given the boring work in the beginning, sometimes I feel like there is a disconnect between junior and senior level, balancing work and study is difficult and pressure can be really high, no influence on to what company/project you are sent.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

B: Probably not.

11. If yes, why?

B: If there is a good opportunity for being promoted to manager within a couple of years, yes and job rotation would be important, maybe even international rotation which is not possible during the graduate programme because of the exams.

12. If no, why?

B: 3.5 years is a long time and it gets boring coming into the same place every day.

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

B: Yes but I would make them aware of the time commitment. I didn't take into account how much time it costs to study and work, every second weekend you have to go to university, you have to take that into consideration.

Interview with EY graduate trainee C (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

C: Did an internship in 2nd year in college, on campus recruitment.

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

C: Only internship big 4

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

C: No

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

C: Did not apply but got the offer after the internship

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

C: No.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

C: Liked the internship

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

C: Prefers culture in EY in comparison to the rest of the big 4, the extra classes (same for KPMG)

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

C: Extra classes for preparation, buddy system helps integrating (directly above you) counsellor (boss)

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

C: Demanding, working hours, not much time for studying

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

C: Probably

11. If yes, why?

C: Probably for a few years, because of culture and progression, there is a lot of change

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

C: Yes, definitely, I just did.

Interview with EY graduate trainee D (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

D: Recruitment fair

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

D: Yes – PWC and Deloitte.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

D: Yes – Diageo, ESB and Private sector jobs among others.

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

D: I was interested in experiencing the commercial working landscape coming from my background in arts and humanities.

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

D: Yes, other big four firms.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

D: I felt that in the short amount of time I had to meet the executives from each of my job interviews, I was valued highest by EY.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

D: I do not know in what ways it is different. If I had to guess I would say that EY are doing all that is possible to prepare themselves for vision 2020 and that this has a derivative impact on EY's graduate programme, intake size, standard of applicant and so forth.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

D: EY recruit graduates which are capable and engaged.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

D: In my department, there is a staffing issue. The consequences of this are graduates committing an increasing amount of time to work and a decreasing amount of time to study.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

D: I am undecided.

11. If yes, why?

D: The experience, the future employment benefits.

12. If no, why?

D: Wanting to try a new discipline, perhaps an internal transfer to a different department would interest me

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

D: It is certainly a fast paced experience with direct exposure to some of the biggest companies in the world and whilst it is difficult at times I would recommend the graduate programme yes.

Interview with EY graduate trainee E (conducted on April 07 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

E: I've known about EY through a family connection. I found out about its graduate programme, during my 6 work placement with EY - as part of my third year in college.

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

E: No

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

E: I didn't apply to other graduate programmes, as I was offered a position in the graduate programme in EY, after my 6 month work placement in my third year of college.

Upon the graduate position being offered, I was informed by EY, not to apply to any other graduate programmes, because I had accepted the offer to the EY graduate programme going into my final year of college.

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

E: Please see Q3.

- I accepted my position in the EY graduate programme, because of experience I had and gained while on my 6 month work placement in EY.

- I also enjoyed the flexibility and support that EY offered its employees, i.e. any over time can be paid back through days off for employees – During my 6 month work placement I noticed that EY treat its employees very well.

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

E: No. Please see Q3.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

E: Please see Q4.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the

E: Ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

I: Exactly.

- EY offers training before you fully start – directly after this you are immediately put on jobs and projects and given on-the-job training.
- EY offers to pay for any exams and give you the required study leave.
- EY really want its employees to have a healthy work-play lifestyle.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

E:

- There is constant support from peers – whether you need support personally, or solving a work problem.
- Managers and Directors take interest an interest the graduates and try to help them to find out what they like and do not like.
- EY encourage you to grow in your career – by allowing you to take on challenging tasks, trying new things and to further your knowledge and expertise through professional exams.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

E: Because I am working the Advisory department – we are told that we do not have to take any professional exams – although it is encouraged. However, during the first 2 weeks of training, there was constant pressure to sign up to the ACCA/ACA exams – which are only mandatory for all other departments in EY.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

E: Yes.

11. If yes, why?

E: Because there is definitely an opportunity to grow and excel in your career at a steady pace.

I find the work that I am currently carrying out, extremely interesting.

EY treats its work force very well.

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

E: Yes I would.

Interview with EY graduate trainee F (conducted on April 13 2016 via email):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

F: Lecturers and students in DCU

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

F: No, I applied for a summer internship in PWC and KPMG though.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

F: No

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

F: I did a summer internship in EY which I enjoyed and subsequently was offered to join the graduate programme. I applied for the summer internship to gain experience and understand if “big four life” was really for me.

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?
PWC offered me a graduate programme.

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

F: I did a summer internship and loved the people culture in EY so I didn't want to take the risk and choose PWC. I also found consulting work in advisory extremely interesting. I was also very happy with my salary offer.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

F: For me I had the choice to do a professional qualification and what qualification I wanted to do. I'm not sure if other firms provide that luxury.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

F: In advisory you don't have a typical 3 year training contract. We are given permanent contracts and have the choice to train in courses relevant to our career ambitions which I love. I'm studying for exams that I genuinely want to achieve and the firm fully supports me in terms of paying for the exams and study leave. New joiners have 2 years of training (3-4 hours twice a month) which has been tailored to our needs in terms of how to become a consultant/ problem solving/ interactions with clients etc.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

F: I was told I would get experience in multiple areas when I joined however that has proven difficult in practice. It's difficult to balance demand/supply and the experience that employees want to pursue. We're working on making it better but it's a challenge.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

F: Yes, my contract is permanent; I don't plan to leave any time soon.

11. If yes, why?

F: I'm learning so much and I'm developing more than ever. I love the people I work with. I'm studying for exams that EY are paying for and I'm very satisfied with my salary.

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

F: Absolutely!

Interview with EY graduate trainee G (conducted on April 13 2016 via email):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

G: Word of Mouth/Reputation

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

G: No

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

G: No

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

G: I went to apply for a Summer Internship in EY during 2nd year of College. I didn't get the internship but I was called back in May. I was offered a training contract with my Masters paid for. It was my intention to apply for this through the milk rounds so it saved me the hassle of going through the milk rounds in my final year of college.

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

G: No

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

G: Being honest, because it was handier than going back through the milk rounds. I didn't see any difference between the 4 at the time and I was happy to join EY.

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

G: I don't think there is a massive amount of difference in what each offer. All have different things that are good/bad but the main drawback in EY is the reputation within the colleges, especially in Dublin. It is looked upon as 4th of 4 and unfortunately a lot of the reason behind that is because of how poor it was in the past. Everyone's sister/brother/cousin has been through the accountancy system in previous years and there is an attitude towards EY "I wouldn't go to EY". EY do themselves no favours by not sponsoring Master's students anymore and not showing up to college events.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

G: I think there are some excellent people in EY and from comparing it to my friends in other big 4 firms, the experience you get is probably more enjoyable.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

G: The main issue I'd see with the EY programme is that it's too passive. It reacts to PWC, KPMG, Deloitte making improvements after the staff have complained about the other 3 getting something we have. EY need to go out of their way to improve their reputation because it's not going to beat the other 3 in Ireland at the moment. The payrise issue last year being a major one.

The study programme/culture isn't good enough. Recently they've brought in more lectures with a better standard but their external people on short term contracts. There needs to be consistency in the service they are providing. Even on a basic level, the others have study rooms and provide soup/sandwiches/hot meals immediately prior to assessments that are on during work. There seems to be a far better study culture in the other 3 and this is created by the structures they have in place. This doesn't exist in EY.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

G: Undecided.

11. If yes, why?

-

12. If no, why?

G: Unlikely as I will probably go travelling.

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

G: I would, depending on what section they can get in to. I've had a great experience to date but I think it is very dependent on what area of the building you are working in.

Interview with EY graduate trainee H (conducted on April 13 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

H: EY reps on campus

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

H: No

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

H: Yes

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?

H: Friendly people, global company and TAS offers rotations within the department which is quite unique

5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?
Accenture, BOI

6. Why did you take the offer of EY?

H: Rotations within TAS and I was drawn to the professional qualifications to add to my skillset while getting exposure to industries I'm interested in e.g. property, corporate finance, banking

7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?

H: The people are much more approachable and down to earth, people are extremely helpful. One thing I noticed from other people is that EY contacts grads very promptly.

I got my offer the same day as my interview while people from other companies got theirs up to a week later which is very nerve wrecking.

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?

H: For my department the rotations, the global name, the central location of the office, the approachability of senior staff and flat power structures.

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?

H: Exam support is lesser in comparison to other big 4 companies. We seem to get the least help as far as internal lectures go, there is less of a focus on exams compared to other big 4 companies.

10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?

H: Yes I would probably stay for 1 year potentially 2

11. If yes, why?

H: I really like my department and it's quite small so you can get great exposure and take on a lot of responsibility, which I like. I don't think I would run out the door to the first opportunity I'm given. I think I would take the time so that my next jobs would be as good or in a more senior position than my current. My main reason for leaving is nothing to with specific companies, I think young people today have less of a tie/loyalty to companies and want to progress themselves on a personally – so for me leaving a job would be if I wanted to work in another country or wanted to advance my career beyond what was available to me in EY

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

H: I think it depends on the particular person. Depending on what they want from their career. I think EY is a great platform for global business and a great foundation to any career. But people tend to have an idealistic view of working in a big 4 company and are often disheartened if they end up doing some fairly basic work. I can only speak for the department I work in as I have no idea what a day in the life of audit is like, but I think I would 100% recommend my department to someone who is interested in getting the chartered accountant qualification, who is willing to take on a lot of responsibility and able to learn quickly, someone who has an interest in finance and to a small degree law too. A lot of people tend to use the grad program in TAS as a stepping stone into investment banking, venture capitalism, banking and private equity and so on.

Interview with EY graduate trainee I (conducted on April 13 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about EY and its graduate programme?

- I: Participated in the 'National Student Challenge', EY co-hosted it.
2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?
- I: No
3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?
- I: Yes
4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of EY?
- I: The graduate programme was presented to me as having flexibility in it which allowed me to try different roles. It also encourages learning and development during the programme which can help you in your career progress.
5. Besides your offer from EY, have you had any other offers? And if so where?
- I: Yes, JP Morgan
6. Why did you take the offer of EY?
- I: JP Morgan would have been back office, where in my current role in EY I am mostly on client site and very much client facing.
7. In what way do you think that EY's graduate programme is different from the ones at PwC, KPMG and Deloitte?
- I: Honestly, I wouldn't know. As stated above I didn't apply to any of the graduate programmes in the other big four.
8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (EY)?
- I: As stated above, flexibility to find your field of interest, encouragement to learn and develop yourself (e.g. support to get a qualification), and EY has an EMEA wide graduate network which allows you to connect with people across the different countries (including an EMEA wide graduate event).
9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (EY)?
- I: When I joined we were the first graduates in the FSO Advisory practice in Dublin, therefore there wasn't much in place at the time around training. This has improved quite a bit during my 1,5 years at the firm though.
10. Do you plan on staying with EY after the graduate programme?
- I: Honestly, I don't know. I think one of the great things about EY is that it really sets you up for your further career. The fact that EY is global will however make it more

likely for me to stay in the firm as they support (promote) moves between offices by staff.

11. If yes, why?

I: See 10

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

I: Yes

Interview with KPMG graduate trainee A (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about KPMG and its graduate programme?

A: UCC campus recruitment, grad-Ireland event where they talked about various graduate programmes, word of mouth from friends who did a summer internship, no prior desk/web research

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

A: Only EY. Wanted to apply for Deloitte but missed the deadline.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

A: No

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of KPMG?

A: Because of the on campus event and the good reputation.

5. Besides your offer from KPMG, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

A: EY (declined offer because of the initial position in transaction services and also heard about bad experiences with EY (graduate programme audit)

6. Why did you take the offer of KPMG?

A: Got offer for audit, EY only offered graduate position for transaction services (not of interest)

7. In what way do you think that KPMG's graduate programme is different from the ones at EY, PwC and Deloitte?

A: No difference, liked the people and position slightly more

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (KPMG)?

A:

- more responsibilities after 1st year (looking forward to train New-comers this year)
- work at client-site a lot (variety in workplace through diverse clients)
- colleagues are at same age group to network (social events)

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (KPMG)?

A:

- starting salary gets you barely through the month
- lectures/trainings for the exams to be paid/subtracted from the salary
- difficult to manage work - studies - private life (especially during peak months for audits)

10. Do you plan on staying with KPMG after the graduate programme?

A: started programme in Oct. 2015 –
will last approx. 3.5 yrs until 2019 (not sure yet whether she is staying or leaving KPMG)

11. If yes, why?

A: Might stay because they offer exchange at the end of training and may "save position" when person returns after a few years being abroad

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

A: yes - especially right after undergrad (stable income to make a living, get to live in Dublin, and get good training)

Interview with KPMG graduate trainee B (conducted on April 06 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about KPMG and its graduate programme?

B: UCC campus recruitment, grad-Ireland event where they talked about various graduate programmes.

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

B: Only EY. Wanted to apply for Deloitte and PwC but missed the deadlines.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

B: Glanbia and Google (full-time position though)

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of KPMG?

B: KPMG talked a lot about training opportunities and social events. The brand KPMG has a good reputation in Ireland.

5. Besides your offer from KPMG, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

B: Took KPMG right away (waiting list for EY)

6. Why did you take the offer of KPMG?

B: I liked the people who worked at KPMG (met at campus event; during the interview)

7. In what way do you think that KPMG's graduate programme is different from the ones at EY, PwC and Deloitte?

B: No difference, liked the people more

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (KPMG)?

B:

- Lots of training provided
- work with people at same age (27 under)
- open door policy
- many social events
- got buddy/mentor (who is 1 year ahead)
- based in Dublin (IFSC), doesn't have to travel

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (KPMG)?

B:

- Busy season (75h+ per week)
- Intensive work environment
- Pay is not high (salary low because KPMG pays for books, training, exams in 1st year)
- Gives 4weeks min. off to study for exams (extra weeks off only when you collect enough afterhours)

10. Do you plan on staying with KPMG after the graduate programme?

B: Yes, maybe do an exchange in another country with KPMG

11. If yes, why?

B: I like it so far.

12. If no, why?

-

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

B: - Yes, there are lots of social events and many opportunities to network with people

Interview with PwC graduate trainee A (conducted on April 04 2016 via phone):

1. How did you hear about PwC and its graduate programme?

A:

- looking for experience (2012) and applied for internship in Big 4
- applied for all of them to diversify the risk
- word of mouth, internet search, career fairs à Ireland doesn't have strong internship culture apart from the Big 4 (they have a lot of on-campus presence, especially for bachelor students)

2. Have you applied to other graduate programmes of the Big Four?

A: Yes, all of them.

3. Have you applied to other graduate programmes?

A:

- Applied to all Big 4
- Bad experience with EY's online form. I filled it in and spent a lot of time doing it only to receive an email right after that saying that he couldn't do it because he was a second-year student. Why didn't they say that before? Also they have bad perks and compensation and benefits (no overtime payed at the time), also office was worse, in every aspect basically they were worse than the others

4. Why did you apply for the graduate programme of PwC?

A: Because of good internship experience and I was looking for experience in that field.

5. Besides your offer from PwC, have you had any other offers? And if so where?

A: Yes, Deloitte

6. Why did you take the offer of PwC?

A:

- Wanted Deloitte initially (longer-standing consulting practice, better projects with more strategy)
- Didn't take the offer because he didn't like the interviewers à really rude and aggressive
- PwC's interview process was friendlier

7. In what way do you think that PwC's graduate programme is different from the ones at EY, KPMG and Deloitte?

A:

- Recruitment process start earlier (smart from them): they give an offer to someone before, so they are not tempted to apply to other jobs or they are less motivated to perform
- Probably similar programmes across the Big 4: a lot of hierarchy and structure
Differences with Accenture: more competitive atmosphere in Accenture (they rank the staff and you are fired if you are consistently at the bottom); training in Chicago or 2-3 weeks whereas in PwC they had the training in the basement of the building
- Payment: EY didn't pay overtime at the time. In EY you could get maximum 1000 euro (fixed regardless of the hours of overtime), whereas it was payed in PwC
- Deloitte: you get vouchers for good jobs (Deloitte dots).
- PwC was very collaborative (at least that's what they said!)

8. In your opinion, what is positive about the programme (PwC)?

A:

- Nice and friendly people, nice atmosphere (a little competitive, but not too much; very stable job). If you do your job OK you can be sure that you will be promoted and be a manager in 5 years
- People: some really brilliant, also exposure to senior people (sitting with them in meetings)
- Variety of industries to work with à good learning opportunities
- Basic skills learned: how to be professional, how to be organized, how to speak to a client, how to use Excel and Word and PPT

9. In your opinion, what is negative about the programme (PwC)?

A:

- No real responsibilities
- No learning about strategy
- Not involved in decision making (all programmes say that your opinion will be taken into consideration from day 1: lie)
- Structure and stability are not good if you are ambitious and want to grow faster (only at a senior level you can move differently)
- Starting salary: 31, second year is 33. For him the point of reference is the rest of the world (in other countries they pay way more!)
- Work long hours and doing very manual and stupid tasks (not intellectually challenging)

- Mentoring and coaching: everyone has one, but you don't really learn from them (they are very busy and you meet them rarely)
- In general very disappointed with the fact that your potential is completely wasted for three years
- Projects-driven. If you do consulting, you don't want to do accounting and tax. But the fact that the company is traditionally in these industry and that they make the vast majority of it, you are rotated in tax and accounting projects (only because they need more people during that day). They market it as "additional experience" but for two months you actually do only boring things that you don't want to do.
- All the Big 4 programmes are very disappointing for an ambitious person. They sell it quite well, but the truth is quite different.
- Benefits mainly only for higher positions
- No international exposure (only at very senior level).

10. Do you plan on staying with PwC after the graduate programme?

A: No, in fact I just quit it.

11. If yes, why?

-

12. If no, why?

See 9.

13. Would you recommend the graduate programme to your friends?

A: If you are a person who likes a stable jobs and you like to work in Ireland.

Appendix 8- Overview of Graduate Programmes of the Big Four in Ireland

Graduate Programs	EY	KPMG	Deloitte	PwC
Service Lines	Advisory, Assurance, Tax, Transactions and Financial Services	Audit, Tax Consulting, Corporate Finance, Restructuring & Forensic, Advisory/ Consulting, Transaction Services	Audit (ACA), Tax (ACA and/or AITI/CTC), Consulting, Corporate Finance (ACA)	Assurance, Risk Assurance Solutions (RAS), Tax, Advisory/Consulting,
Graduate Vacancies	250-270	270 = 160 Audit & Assurance, 75 Tax Consulting, 45 Advisory	280	250+
Application Deadline	End of October 2015	End of October 2015	End October	April 2016
Offices offering Graduate Programs	Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, and Waterford	Dublin, Belfast, Cork, and Galway	Dublin, Cork, Galway, and Limerick	Dublin, Cork, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Waterford, and Wexford

Min. Academic Requirements	min. 2.1 honours degree (or predicted) Leaving Certificate (min. 425p) - Grade A in Lower Level Maths or Grade C in Higher Level Maths - Grade C in Higher Level English	min. 2.1 honours degree (or predicted)	min. 2.1 honours (or predicted) and have a strong academic performance to date	min. 2.1 bachelor's degree (predicted) or equivalent								
Application Hand-In	Online Application Form	Online Application Form	Online Application Form	Online Application Form								
Contact HR/ Careers Helpdesk	Telephone, E-Mail	Telephone, E-Mail	Telephone, E-Mail	Telephone, E-Mail, Online Live-Chat								
Application Process	Aptitude Test (Homepage) / Four assessments in our Strengths Portal (Brochure); Assessment Centre/Interview	Assessment Day incl. business exercise (30-min., questions may be competency-based, or about current affairs) and two 45-min. interviews with director/partner	Competency based interview	Presentation day before Interview; Interview (with 20-min. case study); "Inside Scoop" (after accepting offer)								
Exam Support	Internal exam support curriculum (assessment and exam focused, available during normal work hours)	KPMG Exam Support Programme includes study skills sessions, exam subject and exam preparation tutorials. KPMG Business School offers a range of technology based learning options (technical training and leadership and business skills)	Deloitte Professional Education Exam Support Programme include introductory sessions, subject specific tutorials and exam preparation workshops. These sessions are held in the Deloitte Learning Academy	Support all trainees with a comprehensive programme of in-house exam support before study and exam leave. The programme is tailored to each level of the exams and is designed to develop confidence in exam technique and the technical capability to complete all exams at first attempt.								
Study Leave & Financial Support	- Generous study leave package - Exam Prize and Placement Policy (Awards of up to €2,500 for placements in professional/ institute exams up to 10th place, and awards for passing FAE exams on the 1st sitting)	<p>The study leave provided by KPMG is well in excess of that recommended by the Chartered Accountants Ireland (CAI).</p> <table><tr><th>CAI recommend</th><th>KPMG leave</th></tr><tr><td>CAP 1 4 weeks</td><td>up to 7 weeks</td></tr><tr><td>CAP 2 6 weeks</td><td>up to 12 weeks</td></tr><tr><td>FAEs 7 weeks</td><td>up to 13 weeks</td></tr></table> <p>KPMG provides the following paid study and exam leave for those sitting Tax exams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Part 1 exams: 3 weeks• Part 2 exams: 4 weeks• Part 3 exams: 5 weeks	CAI recommend	KPMG leave	CAP 1 4 weeks	up to 7 weeks	CAP 2 6 weeks	up to 12 weeks	FAEs 7 weeks	up to 13 weeks	<p>Study leave Substantial periods of paid study leave based on training contract or the course of study being undertaken. Banks of overtime worked during the busy season may also be taken at this stage, or time borrowed from the firm depending on your individual circumstances. Holidays may also be taken before or after the study leave period.</p> <p>Financial Support The firm pays for student registration fee, for all exemption entitlements, and for first time course and examination entry fees. Financial support in form of up-front sponsorship for students wishing to complete accountancy masters programmes and conversion diplomas.</p>	<p>Financial support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fully paid salary while on study and exam leave- All registration, exemption, course and exam entry fees- Exam bonuses for students who pass first attempt- Monetary prizes for students who are placed- All supporting manuals and relevant legislation- Annual student subscription to your professional body
CAI recommend	KPMG leave											
CAP 1 4 weeks	up to 7 weeks											
CAP 2 6 weeks	up to 12 weeks											
FAEs 7 weeks	up to 13 weeks											
Sports/Social Events	-	Plenty of Sports & Socials Events	Plenty of Sports & Socials Events; Clubs and Societies for grads	Plenty of Sports & social events; Clubs & societies								

<p>Benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 22 days annual leave plus 9 public holidays - EY Time Bank (time owed in lieu) - Hi-Life Diners club - Defined Contribution Pension Plan - Discounted private health insurance - Life assurance - Eye care (A free eye test each year and refunds against the cost of glasses) - Discounted gym memberships - Lifestyle management website (access to a wide range of discounted goods and services from an extensive list of high street retailers and other well-known organisations) - Tax-efficient Travel Pass Scheme - Cycle to work scheme - Subsidised staff restaurant - Exclusive discounts from EY's mobile phone supplier - Buying additional holiday - Recognition awards - Thank you awards - Monetary Employment Referral Scheme <p>Global Mobility Programmes (mobilisation of high performing people)</p> <p>Firm supported Education Scheme (assist employees wishing to undertake further education)</p> <p>Professional subscriptions (reimbursement of one relevant annual subscription to a recognised professional body)</p>	<p>Core Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3pm finish on Friday before bank holiday weekends - Subsidised staff restaurant - Professional subscriptions paid - Access to KPMG's pension scheme - Illness, disability and life assurance cover - Enhanced maternity leave pay <p>Wellbeing Programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Financial Wellbeing</i> (Employee discounts on gym membership, AA membership, an on-site dry cleaning service, Banking at work with the 3 major banks, Dedicated employee discount scheme through GroupSchemes.com) - <i>Physical Wellbeing</i> (Flu vaccinations, VDU eye testing, Cycle to work scheme) - <i>Emotional Wellbeing</i> (Employee assistance programme, Flexible working arrangements) <p>Flexible Benefits Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purchase of additional annual leave - Medical & dental plans - Tax-saver commuter tickets - Provision for pension AVCs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 21 days annual leave rising with service, plus one add. "Deloitte Day" (discretionary) - Graduation leave (one day paid leave where graduation day falls during a working day) - Defined Contribution pension plan - Group discount with VHI, LAYA Healthcare and Aviva Healthcare - Life assurance cover in the event of death in service - Employee assistance programme (VHI) (confidential counselling programme and information service available to all employees and their families) - Deloitte covers the cost of annual subscription to one approved professional body - Tax efficient travel pass - Cycle to work scheme (Deloitte will facilitate the purchase of a bicycle and/or accessories up to a maximum of €1,000) - Save One4All gift vouchers monthly (contributions are made through Payroll) - Discounts are available from a variety of organisations <p>Workplace Initiatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Deloitte STEPS programme</i> (June-August): Finish 2pm on Fridays once target weekly hours are completed - <i>Equilibrium programme</i> (Initiatives which focus on employee wellness and wellbeing) - <i>Deloitte Dots</i>: Employee recognition awards (Managers can nominate employees who go beyond normal responsibilities to receive a special recognition award) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A range of regular in-house courses for employees. Each department has its own learning and development pathway covering technical and behavioural skills development 	<p>Leave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 22 days annual leave per year, increasing with promotion - 3pm finish on Fri before bank holiday weekends - Graduation day & Wedding leave - Time off in lieu of overtime - Enhanced exam study leave - Paid maternity leave, new parent leave - Occupational sick leave - Additional Christmas leave purchase option <p>Financial wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Life assurance - Pension plan - Employee discounts - Salary advance option on joining - Professional subscription - Wedding gratuity <p>Smarter travel options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tax-efficient cycle to work scheme - Tax-efficient rail or bus travel pass <p>Health & wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subsidised Healthcare insurance and programmes - Annual flu vaccination - Eyesight tests - Confidential Employee Assistance Programme that offers support to you and your family - On-site gym and fitness studio, holistic & beauty therapies (Dublin office only) <p>Culture & lifestyle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition awards programme - Charitable sponsorship <p>Extras that make life easier (Dublin Office Only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site dry-cleaning service (D) On-site ATM machine (D) Complimentary tea and coffee Restaurant and café (D) On-site shop for essential supplies (D)
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